

السير والسلوك



Stages *of* A Spiritual Journey

by

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[edited]



فَاذْكُرُونِي أَذْكُرْكُمْ

fadhkurūnī °adhkurkum
remember Me – I remember you
(Sūrah Baqarah 2:152))



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Stages of A Spiritual Journey

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A materialist passes his life in the dark valley of materialism. He is plunged in the sea of evil desires and always is tossed from this side to that side by the waves of material relations of wealth, wife and children. He cries for help, but in vain and in the end gets nothing but disappointment.

Sometimes in this sea a breath of enlivening breeze (divine impulse) touches him and kindles in him a hope that he may reach the shore safely. But this breeze does not blow regularly. It is only occasional.

“In your life you get some pleasant breaths from your Lord. Make a point of being benefited by them and do not turn away from them.”

Under the divine impulse the novice decides to somehow or other get beyond the world of plurality. This journey is called by the gnostics *sayr wa suluk* (spiritual journey).

Suluk means to traverse the path and *sayr* means to view the characteristics and prominent features of the stages and stations on the way.

*Riyazat*¹ (literally the breaking and training of a young horse) and acts of self-mortification are the provisions required for this spiritual journey. As it is not easy to renounce the material relations, the novice slowly breaks the snares of the world of plurality and cautiously begins his journey from the material world.

Before long he enters another world called ‘*barzakḥ*’ (برزخ). This is the world of his evil desires and inner thoughts. Here he finds that material relations have accumulated a lot of impurities in his heart. These impurities, which are an offshoot of his material relations, are a product of his voluptuous thoughts and sensual desires.

1. Ibn Sina says that next to intention *riyazat* is essential for a gnostic and as such *riyazat* has three aims:

- (i) To remove every thing other than Allāh ﷻ from the path;
- (ii) To make the appetitive soul submissive to the contented soul;
- (iii) To soften the inner self with a view to making it fit to receive enlightenment.

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These thoughts obstruct the novice in the pursuit of his spiritual journey, with the result that he loses peace of mind. He wants to enjoy the recollection of Allāh ﷻ for some time, but these thoughts suddenly interrupt him and foil his efforts.

Somebody has well said that man is always engrossed in his petty thoughts and haunted by the ideas of gain and loss. As a result he not only loses his composure and peace of mind, but can also not pay attention to his spiritual journey to a higher world. It is obvious that mental unrest is more harmful than any physical loss or pain. Man can avoid the clash of external relations and interests, but it is difficult for him to get rid of his own ideas and thoughts because they are always with him.

Anyhow, the true seeker of Allāh ﷻ and traveler in His way is not distressed and discouraged by these obstacles and continues boldly to proceed to his destination with the help of his divine impulse, till he safely gets out of the world of petty and conflicting ideas called *barzakh*. He has to be very vigilant and watchful, lest any vicious thought may remain lurking in some hidden corner of his mind.

Because when these vicious thoughts are turned out, they usually hide in some hidden corner of the mind. The poor spiritual traveler wrongly thinks that he has got rid of their mischief, but when he has found the way to the fountain of life and wants to drink from it, they suddenly appear to ruin him.

This spiritual traveler may be compared to a person who has built a water tank in his house but has not used it for a long time. In the meantime the impurities and pollution have settled down in the bottom of the tank, although the water appears to be clear from above. He thinks that water is clean, but when he gets down into the tank or washes something in it, black patches appear on the surface and he finds that water is dirty.

For this reason it is necessary for the spiritual traveler (*sālik* / سالک) to deeply concentrate his thoughts beyond the world of petty and conflicting ideas with the help of *riyāzat* and acts of self-mortification, so that his or her attention may not be diverted from Allāh ﷻ.

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At last, when, after passing through the barzakh, the spiritual traveler enters the spiritual world, he still has to traverse several more stages the details of which we will describe later.

In short the spiritual traveler, watching his own lower self and the Divine Names and Attributes, gradually advances till ultimately he reaches the stage of total self-annihilation (*fanā*/فنا), that is, passing away from his own perishable will and then the station of abiding in the everlasting Will of Allāh ﷻ (*baqā*/بقا). It is at this stage that the secret of eternal life is revealed to him.

We can infer this doctrine from the Qurʾān also if we ponder over certain verses of it:

وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتًا ؕ
بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ يُرْزَقُونَ

wa lā taḥsabanna ʿalladhīna qutilū fī sabīli allāhi amwātā:
bal ʾaḥyāʾun ʿinda rabbiḥim yurzaqūn

Do not suppose that those killed in the Way of Allāh are dead.

No indeed!

They are alive and well provided for in the presence of their Lord.

(Sūrah ʿĀl ʿImran 3:169)

كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ

kullu shayʾin ḥālikun ʾillā wajḥah
everything will perish save His Face².

(Sūrah al-Qaṣas 28:88)

مَا عِنْدَكُمْ يَنْفَدُ ۖ وَمَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ بَاقٍ ؕ

mā ʿindakum yanqadā : wa mā ʿinda-llāhi bāqā

What is with you must vanish: what is with Allāh will endure.

(Sūrah an-Naḥl, 16:96)

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2. Countenance or “Face” (*wajh*/وجه) of Allāh ﷻ signifies the Divine names and attributes through which Allāh ﷻ manifests Himself in all existing things. All things will perish but their countenance will remain because that is the manifestation of Allāh ﷻ. In simpler words it may be said that the ‘basis’ on which the existence of things depends does not perish.

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These verses put together show that the “Face”, “Countenance” or “Presence” of Allāh ﷻ are those “who are living and who have provisions with their Lord.” According to the text of Qurʾān they never perish. Certain other verses indicate that the “Face”, “Countenance” or “Presence” of Allāh ﷻ denotes Divine Names or Attributes which are imperishable.

In one of its verses, Allāh ﷻ has interpreted the Countenance as the Divine Names and characterizes the Countenance or Presence of Allāh ﷻ of majesty and glory:

كُلُّ مَنْ عَلَيْهَا فَانٍ
وَيَبْقَىٰ وَجْهُ رَبِّكَ ذُو الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ

kullu mañ °alayhā fān:

wayabāqā wajhu rabbika dhū-l-jalālī wa-l-°ikrām

everything upon it will vanish

except the Presence of your Lord filled with majesty and glory

(Sūrah ar-Raḥmān 55:26-27)

All the commentators of the Qurʾān agree that in this verse the phrase “of majesty and glory” qualifies the countenance, and it means the countenance of majesty and glory. As we know, the countenance of everything is that which manifests it. The manifestations of Allāh ﷻ are His Names and Attributes. It is through them that the creation looks at Allāh ﷻ, or in other words, knows Him.

With this explanation we come to the conclusion that every existing thing perishes and wastes away except the glorious and beautiful Names of Allāh ﷻ.

This also shows that the gnostics to whom the verse, “No indeed, they are living and have their provision with their Lord”, applies to manifestations of the glorious and beautiful Names of Allāh ﷻ.

From the above it is also clear what the °Imāms ؑ meant when they said: “We are the Names of Allāh ﷻ.”

Obviously to be the head of a government or to be the highest religious and legal authority is not a position which could be described by these words.

What actually these words denote is the state of passing away in Al-lāh ﷻ, abiding permanently with His Countenance and being a manifestation of His glorious and beautiful Names and Attributes.

In connection with the spiritual journey, another important and essential thing is meditation, deep reflective consideration and internal inward contemplation (*murāqabah*/مراقبة).

It is necessary for the spiritual traveler not to ignore this inward contemplation at any stage from the beginning to the end. It must be understood that *murāqabah* has many grades and is of many types.

In the initial stages the spiritual traveler has to do one type of *murāqabah* and at later stages another type. As the spiritual traveler goes forward, his *murāqabah* becomes so strong that if ever it was undertaken by a beginner, he would either give it up for good or would be mad. But after successfully completing the preliminary stages, the gnostic becomes able to undertake the higher stages of *murāqabah*. At that time many things which were lawful to him in the beginning become forbidden to him.

As a result of careful and diligent *murāqabah* a flame of love begins to kindle in the heart of the spiritual traveller, for it is an inborn instinct of man to love the Absolute Beauty and Perfection. But the love of material things overshadows this inherent love and does not allow it to grow and become visible.

Murāqabah weakens this veil till ultimately it is totally lifted. Then that innate love appears in its full splendour and leads man's conscience towards Allāh ﷻ. The mystic poets often figuratively call this divine love "wine".

When the gnostic continues to undertake *murāqabah*, for quite a long time, divine lights begin to be visible to him. In the beginning these lights flash like lightning for a moment and then disappear. Gradually the divine lights grow strong and appear like little stars. When they grow further, they appear first like the moon and then like the sun.

Sometimes they may appear like a glowing lamp (*miṣbāḥ*/مصباح) (Sūrah an-Nūr 24:35). In the gnostic terminology these lights are known as the gnostic sleep and they belong to the world of *barzakh*.

When the spiritual traveler has passed this stage and his meditation grows stronger, he sees as if the heaven and the earth were all illuminated from the East to the West. This light is called the light of self and is seen after the gnostic has passed the world of *barzakḥ*. When, after coming out of the world of *barzakḥ*, primary manifestations of self begin to occur, the spiritual traveler views himself in a material form. He often feels that he is standing beside himself. This stage is the beginning of the stage of self-stripping.

°Allamah Mirza °Alī Qāzi used to say that one day when he came out from his room into the veranda he suddenly saw himself standing quietly beside himself. When he looked carefully, he saw that there was no skin or flesh on his face. He went back into his room and looked into the mirror. He found his face was as empty as if it had never been.

Sometimes it happens that the gnostic feels as if he did not exist at all. He tries to find himself but he does not succeed. These are the observations of the early stages of self-stripping, but they are not free from the limitations of time and space. In the next stage, with the help of Allāh ﷻ the spiritual traveler can rise above these limitations and also can view the complete reality of his self. It is reported that Mirza Jawād Malakī Tabrizī passed full fourteen years in °Akhūnd Mulla Ḥusayn Qulī Hamdani's company and took from him lessons in gnosis. He says:

“One day my teacher told me about one of his pupils, that thence forward his training was my responsibility. This pupil was very painstaking and diligent. For six years he kept himself busy with meditation and self-mortification. At last he reached the stage of knowing his self and being stripped of his evil self (passion and lust). I deemed it proper that the teacher himself should tell that fact to this pupil. So I took him to the house of the teacher whom I told what I wanted. The teacher said: “That's nothing.” At the same time he waved his hand and said: “This is stripping.”

That pupil used to say: “I saw myself being stripped of my body and at the same time felt as if another person just like me was standing beside me.”

It may be mentioned here that to see the things existing in the world of *barzakḥ* is comparatively of small account. It is of greater significance to view one's own lower self (*naḥs*/نفس) in an absolutely stripped state, for in this case self appears as a pure reality free from the limitations of time and space. The viewing of the earlier stages was comparatively preliminary and partial and this viewing is, so to say, the perception of the whole.

°Aghā Sayyid Aḥmad Karbalā°ī, another well-known and prominent pupil of the late °Akḥūnd (*mullāh, molavi, roḥanī*/آخوند) says: "One day I was sleeping somewhere when all of a sudden somebody awakened me and said to me: 'Get up at once if you want to see the 'eternal light.' I opened my eyes and saw an immensely bright light shining everywhere and in all directions."

This is a stage of the enlightenment of self. It appears in the shape of an infinite light.

When a lucky spiritual traveler has passed this stage, he passes other stages also with a speed in proportion to the attention he pays to meditation. He views the Attributes of Allāh ﷻ or becomes conscious of Names of Allāh ﷻ as absolute qualities. On this occasion he suddenly feels that all existing things are only a unit of knowledge and there exists nothing but one single power. This is the stage of the vision of the Divine Attributes. The stage of the vision of Divine Names is still higher. At this stage the devotee sees that in all the worlds there exists only one Knower and only one Omnipotent and Living Being. This stage is far higher than that of the consciousness of the Divine Attributes, a state which appears in the heart, for now the spiritual traveler does not find any being knowing, powerful and living except Allāh ﷻ.

This degree of vision is usually achieved during the recitation of the Qur°ān, when the reader feels that there is somebody else who is listening to his recitation.

It may be remembered that recitation of the Qur°ān is very effective in securing this state. The devotee should offer the night prayers and should recite in them those sūrahs during the recitation of which prostration is obligatory.

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These are Sūrah Sajdah (32), Sūrah Hā Mīm Sajdah (41), Sūrah an-Najm (53), and Sūrah al-°Alaq (96), for it is very pleasant to fall prostrating while reciting a sūrah. Experience has also proved that it is very effective for this purpose to recite the Sūrah Ṣāāwd (38) in the Thursday night odd numbered prayers (*witr*/وتر).

When the devotee has completed all these stages and visions, he is surrounded by divine impulses and every moment he goes closer to the stage of real self-annihilation, till he is so seized by a divine impulse that he is totally absorbed in the beauty and perfection of the “True Beloved.” He no longer pays heed to himself or to anybody else. He beholds Allāh ﷻ everywhere. There was Allāh ﷻ and nothing was with Him.

In this condition the devotee is plunged in the fathomless sea of divine vision.

It must be remembered that this does not mean that everything in the material world loses its existence. Actually the devotee sees unity in plurality. Otherwise everything continues to exist as it is. A gnostic has said: “I was among the people for 30 years, They were under the impression that I was taking part in all their activities but actually throughout this period I did not see them and did not know anyone but Allāh ﷻ.”

The coming about of this state is of great importance. In the beginning it may come about only for a moment, but gradually its duration grows longer; first it may last for about ten minutes or so, then for an hour and subsequently even for a longer period. This state may even become permanent by the grace of Allāh ﷻ.

In the sayings of the gnostics this state has been termed as “abiding in Allāh ﷻ” or “the ever-lasting life in Allāh ﷻ”. Man cannot attain to this stage of perfection unless he passes away from self.

On attaining to this stage the devotee is not aware or does not see anything other than and except Allāh ﷻ.

It is said that there was an enraptured *ṣūfī* (صوفي) who was seized by a divine impulse. His name was Bābā Farajullāh. People asked him to say something about the world. He said: “What can I say about it? I have not seen it since I was born.”

In the beginning when the vision is weak, it is called a state (*ḥāl/حال*) and its occurrence is beyond the control of the devotee. But when as a result of continued meditation and by the grace of Allāh ﷻ this state becomes a permanent feature, then it is called a station (*maqām/مقام*). Now the state of vision comes under the control of the spiritual traveler or devotee.

Obviously a strong spiritual traveler is he who, along with viewing these states also keeps an eye to the world of also plurality and maintains well his relations to the world of unity and to the world of plurality at the same time. This is a very high position and cannot be attained easily. Perhaps this position is reserved for the Prophets ﷺ and some other chosen people who are favorites of Allāh ﷻ and who can say: “The state of my relation to Allāh ﷻ is such that even the most favored angel cannot attain to it,”³ and at the same time declare: “I am a human being just like you.”⁴

Somebody may say that only the Prophets ﷺ and the °Imāms ﷺ can attain to these high positions. How is it possible for others to attain to them? Our reply is that Prophethood and Imāmate are undoubtedly the special assignments which others cannot reach. But the station of ‘absolute Oneness’ and passing away in Allāh ﷻ which is called *wilāyat* (ولاية) is not exclusively reserved for the Prophets and the Imams, who have themselves called upon their followers to try to attain to this station of perfection. The Prophet ﷺ has asked his Community (°*ummah/أمة*) to follow in his footsteps. This shows that it is possible for others also to advance to this position, or else such instructions would have no meaning.

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن
كَانَ يَرْجُو اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا

laqadā kāna lakum fī rasūli-llāhi °uswatun ḥasanatun li-man
kāna yarjū-llāha wa-l-yawma-l-°ākḥira wa-dḥakara-llāha kathīrā

3. A tradition of an °Imām.

4. “I am a human being just like you, except that I receive revelation.” and also
“I am just a man, just like you, only a warner.” Ḥadīth

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Surely you have an excellent example in the Messenger of Allāh,
for all who put their hope in Allāh and the Last Day
and remember Allāh much.

(Sūrah al-Aḥzāb, 33:21)

There is a ḥadīth in the *Mizanu-l-Hikmah* that once the Prophet ﷺ said: “Had you not been talkative and of uneasy hearts you would have seen what I see and would have heard what I hear.”

This report shows that the real cause of not attaining to human perfection is malevolent thoughts and vicious acts. According to a report from a Shī‘ah (شيعة) source also, the Prophet ﷺ has said: “Had not the *shayaṭīn* been roaming around their hearts, the human beings would have seen the whole kingdom of the heavens and the earth.”

One of the characteristics of this high human position is that it enables the individual holding it to comprehend the divine kingdoms according to his capacity. He gains knowledge of the past and the future and can dominate and control everything, everywhere.

The famous gnostic, Shaykh ‘Abdu-l-Karīm al-Jīlī رحمه الله writes in his book, the ‘Perfect Man’ (*al-‘Insānu-l-Kamīl*) that once he was overcome by such a condition that he felt as if he had been unified with all other existing things and could see everything. This state did not last more than a moment.

Obviously it is because of the seekers’ preoccupation with their physical needs that this state does not last long.

A well known ṣūfī says that a man gets rid of the traces of material development only five hundred years after his death. This period is equivalent to half a day of a divine day.

وَإِنَّ يَوْمًا عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ كَأَلْفِ سَنَةٍ مِّمَّا تَعُدُّونَ

wa ‘inna yawman ‘inda rabbika kālfī sanatin mimmā ta‘uddūn

Surely a day with your Lord
is like one thousand years of your reckoning.

(Sūrah al-Ḥajj, 22:47)

It is evident that the next-worldly blessings and divine bounties and favors are innumerable and unlimited. The words expressing them have been coined on the basis of human needs.

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New words need to be coined with the expansion of human requirements, as it is not possible to express all divine truths and favors by words. Whatever has been said is only symbolical and metaphorical. It is very difficult to express higher truths in words. It has been said: “You are in the darkest world.” According to this saying man is living in the darkest of the worlds created by Allāh ﷻ.

Man coins words to meet his daily requirements on the basis of what he sees and feels in this material world. He has no knowledge of the relations, blessings and spirits of the other worlds and, therefore, he cannot coin words for them. That is why there do not exist proper words in any language of the world which may express higher truths and concepts. Now when our knowledge is limited and our thinking faulty, how can this problem be solved?

There are two groups of people who have talked about higher truths. The first group is the Prophets ﷺ. They have direct contact with the non-material worlds, but they also say: “We, the Prophets, have been ordered to talk to the people according to their intellectual capacity.” That means that they are compelled to express the truths in a way intelligible to the common people. Therefore they have avoided describing the nature of the spiritual lights and their brilliance. They have not talked about unintelligible truths to man. They have only used such words as garden, paradise, *hūrīyah* (حورية) and palaces for the truth about which it has been said: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard and no one has thought about it.” They admit that the truths of the other worlds are indescribable.

The second group is those who advance along the path prescribed by the Prophets ﷺ and perceive the truths according to their capability. They also use a figurative style.



Sincerity of Devotion

It must be remembered that without being sincere (*mukkhliṣ*/مخلص) in the way of Allāh ﷻ it is not possible to attain to spiritual stations and stages. Truth cannot be unraveled by spiritual travelers unless they are fully sincere and single-minded in their devotion.

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There are two stages of sincerity. The first stage is of carrying out all religious injunctions for the sake of Allāh ﷻ only. The second stage is of devoting one's entire self exclusively to Allāh ﷻ. The first stage is indicated by the following verse:

“And they were commanded only to worship Allāh sincerely [preserving] for Him the upright religion (*dīna-l-ḥunafāʿ*), and to stand for the ṣalāh, and pay the zakāh, and that is the clear unequivocal religion (*dīnu-l-qayyimah*).”

وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ حُنَفَاءَ
وَيُقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُوا الزَّكَاةَ ۚ وَذَلِكَ دِينُ الْقَيِّمَةِ

wa mā ʿumirū ʿillā li-yaʿbudu-llāha mukhliṣīna lahu-d-dīna hunafāʿ
wa yuqīmu-ṣ-ṣalāta wa yuʿtu-z-zakāta wa dhālika dīnu-l-qayyimah

They were only ordered to worship Allāh,
making their dīn sincerely His as people of pure natural belief,
and to establish salat and pay zakat – that is the dīn of the upright.
(Sūrah al-Bayyinah, 98:5)

The second stage is indicated by the following verse:

إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلِصِينَ

ʿillā ʿibāda-llāhi-l-mukhlaṣīna

Save the sincere (*ʿibada-llāhi mukhlaṣīn*) worshippers of Allāh.
(Sūrah as Sāāffat 37:128)

There is a well known ḥadīth to the effect that he who has kept himself pure for Allāh ﷻ for 40 days, fountains of wisdom flow from his heart to his tongue.

This tradition also alludes to the second stage of sincerity.

Allāh ﷻ in the Qurʾān has, in certain places, described deeds as being virtuous and pious (*ṣaliḥ/صالح*). For example it said: “Whoever did a wholesome (*ʿāmal ṣāliḥ*) deed”. And at some other places it describes some people as being *ṣaliḥ*. For example at one place it says: “Surely he was one of the sincere (wholesome or upstanding) ones (*ṣāliḥ/صالح*).” Similarly it has sometimes described a deed as sincere and sometimes a person as being sincere.

It is obvious that one's sincerity depends on one's deeds and one cannot be sincere unless one is sincere in all one's deeds and in all that one does or says.

Allāh ﷻ says: "Good words rise up to Him and He raises good action (°*amalu-ṣ-ṣāliḥ*) [to Himself]. (Sūrah al-Faṭīr, 35:10)

إِلَيْهِ يَصْعَدُ الْكَلِمُ الطَّيِّبُ وَالْعَمَلُ الصَّالِحُ يَرْفَعُهُ

°ilayhi yaṣ°adu-l-kalimu-ṭ-ṭayyibu wa-l-°amalu-ṣ-ṣāliḥu yarfauh

To Him ascends the good word, and He elevates sincere actions
(Sūrah al-Fāṭir, 35:10)

It may be remembered that a person who attains to the grade of personal sincerity is endowed with certain other characteristic qualities which are not possessed by others.

An important characteristic which such a person acquires according to a text of the Qur°ān is that he or she becomes immune from the domination of Shayṭān.

قَالَ فَبِعِزَّتِكَ لَا غَوِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ • إِلَّا عِبَادَكَ مِنْهُمْ الْمُخْلِصِينَ

qala fabi°izzatika la°ughwiyannahum °ajma°in.

°iIlā °ibādaka minhumu-l-mukḥḥlaṣīn

[Iblis said], "So by Your Might, I will beguile them, every one – save for the sincere ones among Your worshippers."

(°*ibādaka minhumu-l-mukḥḥlaṣīn*)

(Sūrah aṣ-Ṣāād, 38:82-83)

It is clear that the sincerely devoted slaves of Allāh ﷻ (°*ibādaka-l-mukḥḥlaṣīn*) have been excluded here not because Shayṭān was forced by Allāh ﷻ to do that. They have been excluded because owing to their attaining to the station of 'unity', Shayṭān can no longer gain control over them. As these people made themselves pure for Allāh ﷻ, they see Allāh ﷻ wherever they cast their eyes. Whatever shape Shayṭān may assume, they see the manifestation of the Glory of Allāh ﷻ. That is why Shayṭān admitted from the beginning his helplessness against them. Otherwise, it is his job to seduce the children of °Ādam and Hawā° ؑ and to lead them astray. Shayṭān has no mercy on anyone.

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The second point is that the sincerely devoted slaves of Allāh ﷻ will be exempted from reckoning on the Day of Judgement. Allāh ﷻ says:

وَنُفِخَ فِي الصُّورِ فَصَعِقَ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا مَنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ
wanufikha fi-ṣ-ṣūri faṣa'iqā man fi-s-samāwāti wa man fi-l-arḍi
°illa mas-shāa'allāh

And the trumpet shall be sounded,
and all those in the heavens and the earth shall be thunderstruck
(ṣa'iqā/صَعَقَ)
save those whom Allāh wills.
(Sūrah az-Zumar, 39:68)

This verse definitely shows that an unspecified group of people will be saved from the horrors of the Day of Judgement. When we match this verse with another verse which reads:

وَمَا تَجْزُونَ إِلَّا مَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ • إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلَصِينَ
wa mā tujzawna °illā mā kuñtum ta°malūna
°illā °ibāda-llāhi- l-mukhḷaṣīn
They will be paid for what they did
except for the sincere worshippers of Allāh.
(Sūrah as-Sāāffat, 37:39-40)

it becomes clear what that group will be. The sincerely devoted people need not be brought up for reckoning. They have already secured eternal life as the result of their meditations, self-annihilation and their ceaseless acts of devotion. They have already passed the reckoning and judgement and, as if they had been slain in the way of Allāh ﷻ (shuhadā°/شهداء), they have provision with their Lord.

وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتًا
بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ يُرْزَقُونَ

wa lā taḥsabanna °alladhīna qutilū fi sabīli allāhi amwātā:
bal °aḥyāa°un °inda rabbiḥim yurzaqūn

Do not suppose that those killed in the Way of Allāh are dead.
No indeed!

They are alive and well provided for in the Presence of their Lord,
(Sūrah °Al °Imran 3:169)

Moreover, only that one is produced who is not present. These people are present even before the beginning of the Day of Resurrection, for Allāh ﷻ says that they have a provision with their Lord.

The third point is that on the Day of Judgement people will generally be rewarded and recompensed for their deeds. But these sincerely single-minded people will be favored with rewards beyond their deeds.

فَمَنْ اهْتَدَىٰ فَلِنَفْسِهِ ۖ وَمَنْ ضَلَّ فَإِنَّمَا يَضِلُّ عَلَيْهَا

famani °ihtada fa-li-nafsihi wa man ḍalla fa-innama yaḍillu °alayha

So whoever is guided is guided to his own good
and whoever is misguided, it is to his detriment.

(Sūrah az-Zumar 39:40)

If it is claimed that this verse means only that the sinners will be punished for their sins, but the reward given to the virtuous will purely be a favour bestowed on them by Allāh ﷻ, we will say that this verse is general in its connotation and does not exclusively refer to the sinners. Moreover, there is no contradiction between the favor of Allāh ﷻ and His recompense, for the favor of Allāh ﷻ means that He sometimes rewards a great deal for small deeds. In spite of this kind of favor the reward still remains for the deeds performed. But what this verse says is quite a different thing. It says that what Allāh ﷻ will bestow on His sincerely single-minded slaves will be a pure favor, not a reward for any deeds at all.

لَهُمْ مَا يَشَاءُونَ فِيهَا وَلَدَيْنَا مَزِيدٌ

lahum mā yashā°ūna fihā waladainā mazīdā

They will have there everything they want
and with Us there is still more.

(Sūrah Qāf 50:35)

This verse means that the inmates of Paradise will have all that man can desire or wish and, not only that, but Allāh ﷻ will bestow on them what they cannot imagine or think of. This point is worth considering.

The fourth point is that this group holds such a high position that its members can glorify Allāh ﷻ in the most appropriate manner.

Stages of a Spritual Journey

Allāh ﷻ says: Glorified be Allāh from what they attribute to Him, except what the sincerely single-minded slaves of Allāh say of Him.

سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُصِفُونَ • إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلِصِينَ

subḥāna-llāhi °ammā yaṣifūn • °illā °ibāda-llāhi-l-mukḥlaṣīn

Glory be to Allāh above what they describe –
save for the sincere worshippers of Allāh
(Sūrah as -Saffat 37:159-160)

This is the highest position that a man can occupy.

The above mentioned details show what the blessings of this last stage of gnosis are. But it must be kept in mind that these blessings can be obtained only when a spiritual traveler's ceaseless devotion reaches the stage of self-annihilation so that he may be called to have been slain in the way of Allāh ﷻ and may become eligible for the reward reserved for martyrs. Just as in the battlefield the sword cuts off the connection between the body and soul of a martyr, similarly a spiritual traveler cuts the connection between his body and soul by fighting against his appetitive soul (*nafsu-l-amara*). For this purpose he acquires the help of his spiritual power instead of using his physical force.

In the beginning of his spiritual journey a seeker should lead an ascetic life and should constantly contemplate on the worthlessness of the vanities of the world and thus should break off his relation to the world of plurality. When he ceases to be interested in the world, no material gain will ever please him nor will any material loss grieve him.

لِكَيْلَا تَأْسَوْا عَلَىٰ مَا فَاتَكُمْ وَلَا تَفْرَحُوا بِمَا آتَاكُمْ ؕ
وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ مُخْتَالٍ فَخُورٍ

li-kayla ta'saw °ala mā fātakum wa lā tafrahū bi-mā °atākum
wa-llāhu lā yuhibbu kulla mukḥtālīn fakhūr

In order that you may not despair over matters that pass you by,
nor exult over favours bestowed upon you
for Allāh does not love any arrogant boaster
(Sūrah al-Ḥadid, 57:23)

Indifference to happiness and sorrow does not mean that the spiritual traveler does not feel joy for the bounties of Allāh ﷻ or does not grieve at anything which may distress him, for his happiness for the favors of Allāh ﷻ is not the result of love for worldly rewards such as wealth, rank, honor, fame etc. Rather he loves the bounties of Allāh ﷻ because he finds himself overwhelmed by His Mercy.

After passing this stage the seeker feels that he still loves himself ardently. Whatever spiritual effort and exercises he makes is the result of his self-love. Man is selfish by nature. He is always ready to sacrifice everything else for his own self. He would be willing to destroy anything for the sake of his own survival. It is difficult for him to do away with this natural instinct and to overcome his selfishness. But so long as he does not do so, he cannot expect the divine light to manifest itself in his heart. In other words, unless a spiritual traveler annihilates his individual self he cannot establish his connection with Allāh ﷻ. Therefore it is necessary for him first to weaken and ultimately to smash the spirit of selfishness so that whatever he may do is done purely for the sake of Allāh ﷻ and his sense of self-love may turn into love for Him.

For this purpose ceaseless effort is necessary. After passing this stage the seeker's attachment not only to his body and every other thing material ceases to exist, but even his attachment to his soul is finished. Now whatever he does, he does for Allāh ﷻ alone. If he eats to satiate his hunger or provides for the bare necessities of life, he does so only because his Eternal Beloved wants him to continue to live. All his wishes become subject to the Will of Allāh ﷻ. That is why he does not seek any miraculous power for himself. He believes that he has no right to undertake any sort of spiritual exercise with a view to knowing the past or predicting the future or practicing mind-reading or covering very long distances in a very short time or making changes in the universal system or invigorating his libidinous faculties, for such acts are not done to please Allāh ﷻ, nor can they be motivated by sincere devotion to Him. They mean only self-worship and are performed for the satisfaction of one's own desires, although the person concerned may not admit this fact and although he may apparently be sincerely devoted to Allāh ﷻ.

But according to the following verse he only worships his desire.

أَفَرَأَيْتَ مَنِ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ

°afarāyta mani °ittakḥadḥa °ilahahu hawāh

Have you seen the one who takes as his god his desires?

(Sūrah al-Jathiyah 45:23)

Therefore the spiritual traveler should pass all these stages cautiously and do his best to gain complete control over his vanity. Later we shall further talk on this subject.

When a seeker reaches this stage, he gradually begins to lose interest in himself and ultimately forgets himself totally. Now he sees nothing except the eternal everlasting beauty of his True Beloved ﷻ.

It must be borne in mind that it is essential for the spiritual traveler to gain complete victory over the malevolent horde of licentious desires, love for wealth, fame and power, pride and conceit. It is not possible to attain perfection if any trace of self-love is left, that is why it has been observed that many a distinguished man, even after years-long spiritual exercise and ceaseless acts of devotion, could not attain perfection in gnosis and was defeated in his battle against his phenomenal self. The reason was that his heart was not fully purified, and petty desires still lurked in some corner of his heart, though he was under the impression that all his evil qualities had been uprooted. The result was that at the time of testing the suppressed desires once again raised their head and began to thrive, with the result that the poor seeker fell on evil times.

Success against the lower self depends on the favor of Allāh ﷻ and cannot be achieved without His help.

It is said that one day the late Baḥru-l-°Ulūm was very cheerful. On being asked about the reason of that, he said: “After performing ceaseless acts of devotion for 25 years now I find my deeds free from ostentation.” The lesson of this is well worth remembering.

It is to be remembered that a spiritual traveler must abide by the injunctions of °Islām from the very beginning of his embarking on the path of gnosis to the end of it. Even the slightest digression from the law (*shari°ah*) is not permitted.

If you find anyone claiming to be a gnostic, but that person does not follow all the rules of ʾIslāmīc law and is not strictly pious (*taqī*/تق) and virtuous, that person may be regarded as a hypocrite and impostor. But if he commits a mistake and has some valid reason to justify his wrong action, then it is a different thing.

It is a big lie and calumny to hold that the ʾIslāmīc code of law may be disregarded by a *wali*. The Prophet ﷺ held the highest position among all living beings, but he abided by the injunctions of ʾIslām until he died. Therefore it is absolutely wrong to say that a *wali* is not obligated to observe the law. Anyhow, it is possible to say that an ordinary man worships Allāh ﷻ in order to consummate his potentialities, but a *wali* worships Him because his high position requires him to do so. ʾĀʿisha ؓ is reported to have said to the Prophet ﷺ: “When Allāh ﷻ has said about you: ‘So that Allāh ﷻ may forgive you of your sin, that which is past and that which is to come’, (Sūrah al-Fath, 48:2)

لِيَغْفِرَ لَكَ اللَّهُ مَا تَقَدَّمَ مِنْ ذَنْبِكَ وَمَا تَأَخَّرَ

liyaghfira laka-llahu mā taqaddama min dhanbika wa ma taʾakhkhar

then why do you exert yourself so much to perform the acts of worship?” To this the Prophet ﷺ replied: “Should I not be a thankful slave of Allāh ﷻ?”

This shows that certain individuals worship Allāh ﷻ not to aggrandize their own personality, but to show their gratitude to Allāh ﷻ.

The states which a spiritual traveler experiences and the lights which he beholds should be a prelude to his acquisition of certain traits and qualities. Otherwise a simple change in his condition is not enough. The spiritual traveler must completely rid himself of all remnants of the lower world by means of meditation and ceaseless acts of devotion. It is not possible to acquire the position of the virtuous and the pure without acquiring their qualities. A little slip in the matters of meditation and acts of devotion may cause a spiritual traveler a tremendous loss.

The following verse throws light on this:

Stages of a Spritual Journey

وَمَا مُحَمَّدٌ إِلَّا رَسُولٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ الرُّسُلُ
أَفَإِنْ مَاتَ أَوْ قُتِلَ انْقَلَبْتُمْ عَلَى أَعْقَابِكُمْ

wa-mā muḥammadun °illa rasūlun qadā khalat min qablihi-r-rusul:
°afa°in māta °aw qutila °inqalabātum °ala °a°qābikum

Muḥammad is naught but a Messenger
and he has been preceded by other Messengers.

If he were to die or be killed, would you turn on your heels?

(Sūrah °Āl °Imrān 3:144)

Therefore the spiritual traveler must cleanse his heart and purify himself inwardly and outwardly so that he may be graced with the company of the pure souls. Allāh ﷻ says:

وَذَرُوا ظَاهِرَ الْإِثْمِ وَبَاطِنَهُ

wadḥarū ḍḥāhira-l-°ithmi wa bāṭinah

Forsake all sin; inner or outer

(Sūrah al-An°am 6:120)

Acting according to this verse, the spiritual traveler must pass all those stages which enable him to arrive at the stage of sincere devotion. These stages have been briefly enumerated in the following verse:

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَهَاجَرُوا وَجَاهَدُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ
بَأْمَوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ أَكْظَمُ دَرَجَةً عِنْدَ اللَّهِ ° وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْفَائِزُونَ
يُبَشِّرُهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ بِرَحْمَةٍ مِنْهُ وَرِضْوَانٍ وَجَنَّاتٍ لَهُمْ فِيهَا نَعِيمٌ مُّقِيمٌ
خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا ° إِنَّ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ أَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ

alladḥīna āamanū wa hājarū wa jāhadū fī sabīli-llāhi

bi-°amwālihim wa °anfusihihim °a°ḍḥamu darajatan °inda-llahi

wa °ula°ika humu-l-fā°izūn •

yubashshiruhum rabbuhum bi-rahmatim-minhu wa riḍwāniñw-

wajannātin lahum fihā na°imūmu-muqīmūn •

kḥālidiñna fihā°abadan : inna-llāha °indahū °ajrun °aḍḥim •

Stages of a Spiritual Journey

Those who believe and leave their homes
and strive with their wealth and their lives in the way of Allāh
are of much greater worth in the sight of Allāh.

These are they who are triumphant.

Their Lord gives them good tidings of mercy from Him,
and acceptance and Gardens where enduring pleasures will be theirs.

There they will abide forever.

Surely with Allāh there is an immense reward.

(Sūrah at-Tawbah 9:20-22)

According to this verse there are four worlds preceding to the world of sincere devotion: (i) World of °Islām, (ii) World of °Imān, (iii) World of Hijrah and (iv) the World of Jihād in the Way of Allāh ﷻ,

In his work, *The History of Baghdad*, al-Khātib al-Baghdadi, an 11th-century °Islāmīc scholar, referenced a statement by the companion Jabir ibn °Abd-Allāh ؓ. The reference stated that Jabir ؓ said, “The Prophet ﷺ... returned from one of his battles, and told us, ‘You have arrived with an excellent arrival, you have come from the Lesser Jihād to the Greater Jihād—the self mortification⁵ or striving of a servant (of Allāh ﷻ) against his desires.’”

The spiritual traveler’s struggle with his self (*nafs*) is the greater Jihād, and as such his °Islām (surrender) also should be a major °Islām and his °Imān (faith) also a major °Imān. After passing the stages of °Islām and °Imān he should muster enough courage to be able to emigrate or make hijrah in the company of the inward messenger with the help of the outward Messenger ﷺ or his successor. Thus he should undertake the self-mortification of internal Jihād, so that through this process of struggle (*Jihād*) he may gain the status of a person slain in the way of Allāh ﷻ.

5. Self-mortification, as advanced Šūfis understand it, is a moral transmutation of the inner self. When they say, “Die before you die” they do not mean to assert that the lower self can be essentially destroyed, but that it can and should be purged of its attributes which are evil. These attributes – ignorance, pride, uncharitableness, etc – are extinguished, and replaced by the opposite qualities, when the will is surrendered to Allāh ﷻ and when the mind is concentrated upon Him. In this way “Dying to self” is really living in Allāh ﷻ.

Stages of a Spritual Journey

The spiritual traveler must keep it in mind that from the beginning of his spiritual journey till the stage of the self-mortification of internal jihād (جهاد) he has to face many obstacles, which are created either by man or the shayṭān. One has to pass through the worlds of greater ʾIslām and greater ʾImān before reaching the stage of the self-mortification of inner Jihād and gaining the status of a martyr. In the spiritual journey the “greater” forms which is to say “internal” forms of ʾIslām, ʾImān, Hijrah and Jihād are preliminary stages preceding the final stage.

The major obstacles in the way to these stages are called greater infidelity (*kufri-l-kabīr*) and major hypocrisy (*nifāqu-l-kabīr*). At this stage the lesser *shayāṭin* can do no little or no harm to the spiritual traveler, but *The Shayṭān* who is their supreme head still tries to obstruct the progress of the traveller.

Therefore, while passing through these stages he should not think that he is out of danger. So long as he does not pass out of the above-mentioned “major worlds”, Shayṭān will continue to obstruct his way. The spiritual traveler should keep up his spirit and beware of Shayṭān, lest he be involved in major infidelity or major hypocrisy.

After passing through the worlds of major ʾIslām and major ʾImān the spiritual traveler undertakes major emigration and then by means of the self-mortification of Jihād he passes through major self-resurrection and then passes into the valley of those who are sincerely devoted to Allāh ﷻ.

May Allāh ﷻ grant us all success.



Part Two

The Twelve Worlds

On the basis of what has been said above, a seeker making a spiritual journey has to pass through twelve Worlds before reaching the world of sincerity. The names of these worlds are:

Minor °Islām, Major °Islām, Greater °Islām, Minor °Imān, Major °Imān, Greater °Imān, Minor Hijrah, Major Hijrah, Greater Hijrah, Minor Jihād, Major Jihād and Greater Jihād. It is necessary to know the characteristics of these worlds and to be aware of the obstacles and barriers which a seeker has to face while advancing towards them. To make our point clear we describe these worlds briefly.

Major °Islām means complete submission to Allāh ﷻ, not to criticize any action of His and to believe with full conviction that what is happening is not without some advantage and what is not happening was not advisable. °Imām °Alī ؑ hints at this point when he says that, “°Islām means submission and submission signifies conviction.” A devotee not only should have no objection against any Divine directives or decrees but also should not feel even in his heart unhappy about any of them. Allāh ﷻ says:

But nay, by your Lord, they will not be faithful unless they make you judge of what is in dispute between them and find within themselves no dislike of that which you decide, and submit with full submission. (Surah an-Nisa, 4:65)

فَلَا وَرَبِّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّىٰ يُحَكِّمُوكَ فِيمَا شَجَرَ بَيْنَهُمْ
ثُمَّ لَا يَجِدُوا فِي أَنفُسِهِمْ حَرَجًا مِّمَّا قَضَيْتَ وَيُسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا

fa-lā wa rabbika lā yu°minūna ḥattā yuḥakkimūka fīmā shajara baynahum
thumma lā yajidū fī °anfusiḥim ḥarajam-mimmā qaḍayta
wa yusallimū taslīmā

No, by your Lord, they do not believe until they make you their judge in the disputes between them, and then find no resistance within themselves to what you decide and submit themselves completely. (Sūrah an-Nisā, 4:65)

This is the stage of greater °Islām. At this stage °Islām should infiltrate the soul of the seeker and truly overwhelm his heart and life.

The Twelve Worlds

When the heart of the seeker is illuminated by the light of greater ʾIslām, not only his heart testifies that everything is from Allāh ﷻ, but he also physically observes this truth. In other words, he often sees with the eyes of his heart that Allāh ﷻ is omnipresent and omniscient. This stage is called that of vision and greater ʾIslām. But as the spiritual traveller has not yet attained to perfection, he has to face many material obstacles; especially when he is busy with his natural needs, a state of unmindfulness (*ghaflah*/غفلة) overcomes him. Therefore it is necessary for him to use his will power so that the state of vision may become a permanent feature for him and may not be disturbed by his other activities. For this purpose it is necessary to push the state of greater ʾIslām from the heart to the soul so that this elementary state may become a fully developed state governing all internal and external faculties. This is the stage which is called by the gnostics the station of excelling, of doing the absolute very best in all that they do. (ʾ*ihsān*/إحسان).

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا ؕ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَمَعَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

wa-lladhīna jāhadū finā la-nahdiyannahum subulanā
wa-ʾinna-llaha lama°a-l-muḥsinīn

As for those who strive in Our cause,
We will guide them to Our paths. For Allāh is with those who excel.
(Sūrah al-ʾAnkabūt, 29:69)

As such, a striver in the way of Allāh ﷻ cannot find the way of guidance and proximity of Allāh ﷻ until he reaches the stages of doing his absolute best in all that he does or tries to do.

An eminent companion of the Prophet ﷺ and the sixth person to accept ʾIslām just after Abu Bakr and Zayd ibn Ḥarīṭhah ؓ, Abu Ḍharr Ghifari ؓ, once asked the Prophet ﷺ what struggling do do your very best (ʾ*ihsān*/إحسان) signified. The Prophet ﷺ said: “That you worship Allāh ﷻ as though you see him, knowing that if you do not see Him, surely He sees you.”

In other words, one should worship Allāh ﷻ as if one were seeing Him. If one is unable to worship Him in this way, then there is a lower grade of worship which is that one should worship Allāh ﷻ as though Allāh ﷻ were seeing one.

So long as the seeker does not reach the stage of Greater Imān, he is only occasionally invested with the state of *ʾihsān*. In this state he performs the acts of worship with zeal and fervor. His soul, having been imbued with faith, puts all his organs and faculties on their proper job. The organs and faculties, once controlled cannot disobey the soul even for a moment. Concerning the devotees who have attained to the stage of Greater ʾImān, Allāh ﷻ says:

- قَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ • الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي صَلَاتِهِمْ خَاشِعُونَ
- وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنِ اللَّغْوِ مُعْرِضُونَ

qadā ʾaflaḥal-muʾminūna • alladhīna hum fī ṣalatihim khāshīʿūn.
wa-lladhīna hum ʿani-llaghwi muʿridūn •

It is the believers (*muʾminūn*) who are successful:
Who are humble in their prayers and turn away from all that is vain.
(Surah al-Muʾminūn, 23:1-3)

The one who busies himself with things that are meaningless, vain and trivial is precisely the one who is interested in them. A spiritual traveller who has attained to the stage of Greater ʾImān and for whom doing their best has become a habit, is not fond of anything vain or trivial, for no heart can love two contradictory things at one and the same time. Allāh ﷻ Himself has said:

مَا جَعَلَ اللَّهُ لِرَجُلٍ مِنْ قَلْبَيْنِ فِي جَوْفِهِ

mā jaʿala-llāhu li-rajulim-min qalbayni fī jawfih
Allāh has not placed two hearts in any one's chest
(Sūrah al-Aḥzāb, 33:4)

If we find a seeker frittering away his time in vain amusements, we can easily conclude that such a person is not fully devoted to Allāh ﷻ and that his heart is not free from the hypocrisy which is called in this context Greater Hypocrisy (*nifāqu-l-kabīr*/نفاق الكبير) and which is the opposite of Greater ʾImān (*ʾimānu-l-kabīr*/إيمان الكبير).

As a result of such hypocrisy one does not act according to one's inner prompting, but is guided by reason, expediency or apprehensions. The following verse refers to this kind of hypocrisy:

إِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ يُخَادِعُونَ اللَّهَ وَهُوَ خَادِعُهُمْ وَإِذَا قَامُوا إِلَى الصَّلَاةِ قَامُوا
كَسَالَىٰ مُِرَاعُونَ النَّاسِ وَلَا يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا

°inna-l-munāfiqīna yukhādī°ūna-llāha wa huwa khādī°uhum wa
°itdhā qāmū °ila-ṣ-ṣalāti qāmū kusāla yurā°ūna-n-nāsa wa lā
yadhkurūna-llaha °illā qalilā

The hypocrites think they deceive Allāh, but He is deceiving them.
When they get up to pray, they get up lazily, showing off to people,
and only remember Allāh very little.

(Sūrah an-Nisā° 4:142)

When the spiritual traveller attains to the stage of Greater °Imān, no trace of hypocrisy is left in him. His actions and deeds are no longer guided by unreliable directives of reason nor by any apprehension, expediency or conservatism. All his actions are then motivated by inner zeal, hearty inclination and real love. Once the spiritual traveller attains to the stage of Greater °Imān, he should be ready for the Greater Hījah (*hijratu-l-kabīrah*/هجرة الكبيرة). There are two sides of this hijrah: one is bodily hijrah which means giving up social dealings with the wicked, and the other is the hijrah of the heart which means not making friends with them. A spiritual traveller not only has to abandon all habits, customs and usages which prevent him from pursuing the path of Allāh ﷻ, but has also to dislike them from the core of his heart. Such customs and usages have been mostly imported from the countries of the disbelievers. A man living in a material society becomes a prisoner of many customs and habits prevalent among the worldly people forming the basis of their social dealings. For example it has become customary to regard a person keeping quiet at an academic discussion as ignorant. Many people consider it a mark of their eminence to sit at and take the head of the table at a meeting or seek to go first so as to take precedence over others while walking in company.

Fine talk and flattery are called good manners, and a behavior contrary to these customs is described as bad manners and vulgarity. The spiritual traveller should strive with the help of Allāh ﷻ to ignore such odd customs and distorted ideas.

In this regard he should not fear anybody and pay no attention even to the criticism of those who call themselves great scholars. There is a report in Kulayni's Jami^c on the authority of ʿImām Jaʿfar Ṣādiq عليه السلام that the Prophet ﷺ said: “There are four pillars of disbelief: greed, fear, resentment and anger.” In this ḥadīth, fear means an apprehension on one’s part that people would be angry if their distorted ideas and wrong customs were opposed.

In short the spiritual traveller should say good-bye to all habits and traditions, customs and usages which obstruct his advancement towards Allāh ﷻ. The gnostics call this attitude ‘madness’, (جنون) because mad people also take little interest in and pay little attention to the popular habits and traditions and do not care what the other people would say. A mad man (*majnūn*/مجنون) sticks to his own ways and does not fear any opposition.

Following his success in hijrah and getting rid of the prevailing customs, the spiritual traveller enters the field of Major Jihād, which means a fight against the devilish hordes. Even at this stage the spiritual traveller is still a captive of his lower self, overwhelmed by his passions and low desires and perplexed by apprehensions and worries, anger and disappointments. If anything that is not to his liking happens, he is upset and feels hurt. In order to overcome all his worries, griefs and pains, the spiritual traveller should seek Divine aid and crush the forces of apprehension, anger and lust.

On getting rid of worldly irritations and worries the seeker will enter the world of Greater ʿIslām. Then the seeker will feel as if he or she was prevailing over the whole world, was safe from death and effacement and was free from every kind of conflict. The seeker will find in his or her self a purity and attraction not connected with this lower world. At this stage the seeker becomes totally unconcerned with this transient world, as if he was dead. Now one begins a new life living in the world of humanity but seeing everything in the shape of the angelic (*malakūt*/ملکوت) world.

Material things can no longer do one any harm, as one has now reached the middle stage of self-resurrection and the veil has been gradually lifted from before one’s eyes and one can see many hidden things. This station is called: Greater ʿIslām.

Allāh ﷻ clearly refers to this in the Qurʾān with the following words:

أَوْ مَنْ كَانَ مَيِّتًا فَأَحْيَيْنَاهُ وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُ نُورًا يَمْشِي بِهِ فِي النَّاسِ
كَمَنْ مِثْلُهُ فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ لَيْسَ بِخَارِجٍ مِنْهَا ؕ
كَذَلِكَ زُيِّنَ لِلْكَافِرِينَ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

ʾawa man kāna maytañ fa-ʾaḥyaynāhu
wa jaʿalnā lahu nūran yamsḥī bihi fi-n-nāsi
kaman maṭḥaluhu fi-ḍḥ-ḍḥulumāti laysa bi-kḥārijin minhā;
kadḥalika zuyyina li-l-kāfirīna mā kānū yaʿmalūn

Is someone who was dead and whom We brought to life,
supplying him with a light by which to walk among people,
the same as someone who is in utter darkness,
unable to emerge from it?

That is how what they were doing
is made to seem attractive to the non believers.

(Surah al-Anʿām, 6:122)

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ
فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيَاةً طَيِّبَةً ۖ وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ
man ʿamila ṣāliḥan miñ ḍḥakarīn ʾaw ʾunṭḥā wa huwa muʾminūn
fa-la-nuḥyiyannahu ḥayātan ṭayyibah: wa la-najziyannahum
ʾajārahum bi-ʾaḥsani mā kānū yaʿmalūn

Whoever performs good deeds, whether male or female,
and is a believer,
most certainly We will make him (or her) live a good life,
and most certainly We will pay such as these their reward
in accordance with the best of what they used to do.

(Sūrah an-Naḥl, 16:97)

It should be kept in mind that what the devotee views in this state may create a sense of false pride and as a result of that, your worst enemy, that is your lower self, may begin to resist you. There is a ḥadīth which says:

“Your most deadly enemy is the lower appetitive self (*an-nafsu-l-[°]ammārah*/النفس لامارة) which is within you.”

In these circumstances the seeker is in danger of being involved in Greater Infidelity (*shirk al-[°]ākbar*/شرك الاكبر) unless he is helped and protected by Allāh ﷻ. The following tradition refers to this kind of infidelity. “The lower self is the greatest idol.” It was this idol-worship which [°]Ibārāhīm ؑ prayed to Allāh ﷻ to be protected from when he said: “Save me and my sons from worshipping idols.” Evidently it is unimaginable that the Prophet [°]Ibārāhīm ؑ would ever worship any man-made idols. It was this kind of idol-worship from which the Prophet ﷺ also sought refuge when he said: “Allāh ﷻ, I seek refuge in you from hidden polytheism.”

Therefore the devotee should whole-heartedly acknowledge his humbleness and completely do away with the idea of self-conceit from his heart so that he may not commit greater infidelity and may succeed in attaining to Greater [°]Islām. Some gnostics have throughout their life avoided even the use of the word ‘I’. Some others attributed all that is good to Allāh ﷻ, and only what could not be attributed to Allāh ﷻ they attributed to themselves. They used the first person plural pronoun while talking of a thing that could be attributed to both themselves and to Allāh ﷻ. They derived this method from the story of Mūsā ؑ and al-Khīḍr ؑ (the Evergreen One/الخضر). al-Khīḍr ؑ said:

أَمَّا السَّفِينَةُ فَكَانَتْ لِمَسَاكِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ فِي الْبَحْرِ فَأَرَدْتُ أَنْ أَعِيبَهَا
وَكَانَ وَرَاءَهُمْ مَلِكٌ يَأْخُذُ كُلَّ سَفِينَةٍ غَصْبًا

āmmā-s-safīnatu fa-kānat li-masākīna ya[°]malūna fi-l-baḥri
fa [°]aradtu [°]an [°]a[°]ībahā wa kāna waraahum malikun
ya[°]kḥudḥu kulla safinatin ghaṣbā

As for the boat, it belonged to poor people who worked on the sea.

I wanted to damage it

because a king was coming behind them, seizing every boat.

(Surah al-Kahf, 18:79)

As the act of damaging the boat could not be attributed to Allāh ﷻ, he attributed it to himself and used a first person singular pronoun.

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In the next [°]āyāt, however, he uses the plural pronoun ‘we’, since the act of slaying the boy could be attributed both to himself ﷺ and to Allāh ﷻ,

وَأَمَّا الْعَلَامُ فَكَانَ أَبَوَاهُ مُؤْمِنَيْنِ فَخَشِينَا أَنْ يُرْهَقَهُمَا طُغْيَانًا وَكُفْرًا
فَارَدْنَا أَنْ يُبَدِّلَهُمَا رَبُّهُمَا خَيْرًا مِنْهُ زَكَاةً وَأَقْرَبَ رَحْمًا

wa °amma-l-ghulāmu fa-kāna °abawāhu mu°minayni
fa-khashīnā °an yurhiqahumā ṭughyānan wa kufrā •
fa-°aradnā an yubādilahumā
rabbuhumā khayram-minhu zakātan wa °aqāraba ruḥmā •

And as for the boy; his parents were believers
and *we* feared lest he should oppress them by rebellion and
disbelief. And therefore we intended that their Lord
should change him for one better in purity and nearer to mercy.
(Sūrah al-Kahf 18:80-81)

As the intention of doing good to someone is attributable to Allāh ﷻ, so it has been attributed to Him.

وَأَمَّا الْجِدَارُ فَكَانَ لِغُلَامَيْنِ يَتِيمَيْنِ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ
وَكَانَ تَحْتَهُ كَنْزٌ لَهُمَا وَكَانَ أَبُوهُمَا صَالِحًا فَأَرَادَ رَبُّكَ أَنْ يَبْلُغَا أَشُدَّهُمَا
وَيَسْتَخْرِجَا كَنْزَهُمَا رَحْمَةً مِنْ رَبِّكَ

wa °amma-l-jidāru fa-kāna li-ghulamayni yatīmayni fi-l-madīnati
wa kāna taḥtahu kanzun lahumā wa kāna °abūhumā ṣāliḥaṇ
fa °arāda rabbuka an yablughā °ashuddahumā
wa yastakhrijā kanzahumā raḥmatam-mir-rabbik

And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city,
and there was beneath it a treasure belonging to them.

Their father had been righteous,
and your Lord intended that they should come to their full strength
and should bring out their treasure as a mercy from their Lord.
(Sūrah al-Kahf, 18:82)

We also find the Prophet °Ibārāhīm ﷺ employing this style of speech in the Qur°ān where he is quoted as saying,

• الَّذِي خَلَقَنِي فَهُوَ يَهْدِينِ • وَالَّذِي هُوَ يُطْعِمُنِي وَيَسْقِينِ
• وَإِذَا مَرِضْتُ فَهُوَ يَشْفِينِ •

°alladhī khalāqanī fa-huwa yahdīni •
wa-lladhī huwa yuṭ°imunī wa yasqīn •
wa-idhā mariḍtu fa-huwa yashfīn •

“It is He who created me and who guides me.
and it is He who gives me drink and feeds me
and it is He who heals me when I am sick.

(Sūrah ash-Shu°ara 26:78-80)

Here the Prophet °Ibārāhīm ؑ attributes sickness to himself and healing to Allāh ﷻ.

A seeker should leave no stone unturned to attain to the stage of Major °Islām and to do away with all forms of self-conceit.

Hajji °Imūm Quli Nakhjawanī was the teacher in gnosis of Agha Sayyid Ḥusayn Agha Qazī, the father of the late Agha Mirza °Alī Qazī. He completed his training in morality and gnosis at the hands of Sayyid Quraysh Qazwinī.

He says that when he became old one day he saw that he and Shayṭān were standing on the top of a hill. He passed his hand over his beard and said to Shayṭān: “Now I am an old man, please spare me if you can.” Shayṭān said: “Look this side.” Sayyid Qazwinī says that when he looked that side, he saw a ditch so deep that it sent a wave of ice into his spine. Pointing to that ditch, Shayṭān said: “I have no sympathy or mercy for anybody. If I could lay my hands on you once, you would fall into the bottom of this ditch from which you would never have an escape.”

Next to Greater °Islām is the stage of Greater °Imān, which means such an intense upsurge of Major °Islām that it may transform the knowledge of truth into a clear view of it. In the meantime the spiritual traveller moving from the angelic world (*al-malakūt*/الملکوت) enters the world of souls (*al-jabarūt*/الجبوت) sometimes also called the world of power or the world of absolute Immensity or sovereignty, or domination, which is that of the Spirit.

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For the one who enters the world of the jabarūt, greater self-resurrection would have already taken place and he can now see the sights of the world of the soul.

Having reached the world of the jabarūt the spiritual traveller should make hijrah and emmigrate from his own existence. This journey will be from his own existence to the absolute existence. Some of the 'awliyā' have expressed this idea by saying: "Leave your self and come." The following verses of the Qur'ān hint at it:

يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ • اذْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ رَاضِيَةً مُّرْضِيَةً •
فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي • وَادْخُلِي جَنَّاتٍ

yā 'ayyatuha-n-nafsu-l-mutma'innah •

'irji'ī 'ila rabbiki raḍiyatan mardiyah • fa-dħkħulī fī 'ibādī •
wa-dākħulī jannatī

Oh you whose self is at peace.

Return to your Lord pleased and well-pleasing.

Enter among My worshippers — enter My Garden.

(Sūrah al-Fajr 89:27-30)

In this verse the soul/self (*nafs*) has been described as being at peace and addressed as such. It has been asked to join the ranks of the chosen people of Allāh ﷻ and enter paradise – now!

The spiritual traveller has now completed the stage of Major Jihād and entered the world of victory and conquest which is the headquarters of contentment (*riḍā*/رضا), but as some traces of his existence still remain, he has not yet completed the process of self-annihilation and hence needs embarking on the Greater Jihād. Because of this deficiency he is not yet absolutely free. His place is still in the compound hinted at in the verse of Qur'ān:

فِي مَقْعَدٍ صِدْقٍ عِندَ مَلِكٍ مُّقْتَدِرٍ

fī maq'adi ṣiḍāqin 'inda malīkim-muqāṭadīr

on seats of honour in the presence of an All-Powerful King

(Sūrah al-Qamar 54:55)

Needless to say what is meant by All-Powerful King is Allāh ﷻ.

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After this stage the spiritual traveller should carry out Jihād against any remaining traces of his existence and remove them completely, so that he may step forward into the field of absolute ‘unity’. This world is called the world of victory and conquest. The spiritual traveller has to pass through twelve such worlds before he succeeds in passing the stages of Greater Hijrah and Greater Jihād and enters the field of sincerity. Then he will be called successful and victorious and will enter the world of sincerity and the realm of:

إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

°inna-li-llāhi wa°innā °ilayhi raji°ūn

surely we belong to Allāh and surely to Him we shall return
(Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:156)

For him the greater self-resurrection will already have taken place. He will enter the stage of total passing away from self after crossing the curtains of bodies, souls and every thing fixed and appointed. He will have one foot in the world of divinity, and he will have passed the stage of:

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ

kullu nafsin dhā°iqatu-l-mawt

every soul shall taste death

(Sūrah °Al °Imarān 3:185)

Such a person, being at the stage of passing away from self, though consciously alive, yet in one sense will be dead. That is why concerning °Imām °Alī ؑ, the Prophet ﷺ said: “Whoever wants to see a dead man walking, let him look at °Alī ibn Abi Ṭālib.”

Explanation: The spiritual excellences and their signs and consequences which have been briefly mentioned above are the favors which have been bestowed by Allāh ﷻ exclusively on the followers of the Last Prophet, Muḥammad ﷺ. The merits and the perfections which the spiritual travellers of the previous nations (*al-°umam*/الأمم) could gain, were of limited nature. After reaching the stage of passing away from self, they could view the Divine Names and Attributes, but could not advance any further. The reason was that the highest stage of their gnosis was *lā °illaha illa-llāh*.

Saying “There is no deity, but Allāh” meant they could only see as far as the most Beautiful Names and Attributes of Allāh ﷻ. On the other hand the spiritual travellers of the °Islāmic community (°*ummah*/أُمَّة) have reached several higher stages which cannot be precisely described in words. The reason is that the guiding light of all °Islāmic rules is the verse,

سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ

subhana-llāhi °amma yushrikūn

Glory be to Allāh above all they associate with Him.

(Sūrah al-Ḥashr 59:23)

The spiritual progress of a Muslim seeker connected to this verse, the stages of which they can traverse, are too high to be easily or adequately explained.

That is why even the former Prophets ﷺ could think of no station higher than that of the vision of the Divine Names and Attributes, with the result that they had to face many difficulties and hardships, and were able to get rid of them only by invoking the station of the spiritual guardianship of the Prophet ﷺ, °Imām °Alī, Fāṭimah az-Zahra and al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn ﷺ.⁶ It was the spiritual guardianship of these personalities that delivered earlier Prophets ﷺ from their worries and grief. Although the earlier Prophets ﷺ were to a certain extent conscious of the high position of the Ahl-i-Kisā° ﷺ, and that is why they invoked it, till the end of their life they did not really know all its characteristics. Some Qur°ānic verses show that °Ibārāhīm ؑ once or twice viewed these higher truths, but only momentarily. The dimension of time cannot be overlooked. Revelation did not occur on a flat plane. Accordingly the permanent vision for the earlier Prophets ﷺ was only in the other world only not this. Before quoting the Qur°ānic verses in support of our point it may be mentioned that the text of the Qur°ān clearly shows that the position of sincerity also has several grades.

6. [Ed. Note: It is often mentioned in the Majālis that when Allāh ﷻ asked Adam ؑ to recite the names that Allāh ﷻ taught him (2:31), he first recited the names of those who were created from the Nūr of the Prophet ﷺ which was split into two and then into three and then into five.]

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There were a number of Prophets ﷺ who held this station (*maqām/* مقام) to a certain extent but could not attain to its higher grades, for which they used to pray to Allāh ﷻ. For example Allāh ﷻ says in the Qurʾān about Yūsuf ﷺ that he was of Our single-minded slaves (12:24). Still he ﷺ prayed to Allāh ﷻ, saying:

فَاطِرَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَنْتَ وَلِيِّي فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ ۖ
تَوَفَّنِي مُسْلِمًا وَأَلْحِقْنِي بِالصَّالِحِينَ

fāṭira-s-samāwāti wa-l-arḍi ānta waliyyī fi-d-dunyā wa-l-ʾākhirah;
tawaffanī musliman wa-ʾalhiqnī bi-ṣ-ṣāliḥīn.

You are my protecting friend in this world and the last.
Make me to die submissive to you and join me to the righteous.
(Sūrah Yūsuf, 12:101)

The prayer shows that he did not attain the position he was praying for during his life time, and so he prayed that he might be granted it after his death. Whether his prayer would be fulfilled in the hereafter, the Qurʾān is silent. Similarly, ʾIbrāhīm ﷺ held a high position in the station of sincerity, yet he prays, saying:

رَبِّ هَبْ لِي حُكْمًا وَأَلْحِقْنِي بِالصَّالِحِينَ

rabbi habā lī ḥukman wa ʾalhiqnī bi-ṣ-ṣāliḥīn

My Lord, grant me wisdom and unite me with the doers of good.
(Sūrah aṣḥ-Shuʿarāʾ 26:83)

This shows that the station of the righteous doers of good deeds (*aṣ-ṣāliḥīn*) is higher than that of sincerity. That is why ʾIbrāhīm ﷺ wanted to be joined to those who occupied this position. Allāh ﷻ did not accede to his prayer in this world, but promised to grant him the position he asked for in the hereafter:

وَلَقَدْ اصْطَفَيْنَا فِي الدُّنْيَا ۖ وَأَنَّهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِّنَ الصَّالِحِينَ

wa laqadi ʾiṣṭafaynāhu fi-d-dunya
wa ʾinnahu fi-l-ākhirati lamina-ṣ-ṣāliḥīn

Surely We chose him in the world,
and lo! in the final world he is among the righteous.
(Surah al-Baqarah, 2:130)

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It may be noted that the position of righteousness for which the earlier Prophets ﷺ craved is different from that which was conferred on ʾIbārāhīm عليه السلام and his descendants according to this verse:

وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُ إِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ نَافِلَةً ۖ وَكُلًّا جَعَلْنَا صَالِحِينَ

wa wahabnā lahu ʾishāqa wa ya°qūba nāfilatan
wa kullan ja°alna ṣālihīn

And We bestowed upon him ʾIshāq, and Ya°qūb as a grandson.
Each of them We made righteous (*ṣālih*).

(Sūrah al-ʾAnbiyā° 21:72)

This kind of righteousness they all enjoyed, including ʾIbārāhīm عليه السلام himself. But he was still praying to be joined to the righteous. That shows that he wished for something beyond and higher than what he had already been granted.

The fact that the Prophet ﷺ and some other people during their lifetimes occupied this higher position is clear from this verse:

إِنَّ وَلِيِّيَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي نَزَّلَ الْكِتَابَ ۖ وَهُوَ يَتَوَلَّى الصَّالِحِينَ

ʾinna waliyyiya-llahu-lladhī nazzala-l-kitāba
wa huwa yatawalla-ṣ-ṣālihīn

Surely my Protector is Allāh who revealed the Book.
He befriends the righteous.

(Sūrah al-A°raf, 7:196)

According to this verse, first the Prophet ﷺ admits that Allāh ﷻ is his Protector and then declares that his protecting friend is the One who befriends and protects the *ṣālihīn*. This shows that at that time there existed certain *ṣālih* individuals who occupied the position of righteousness, whom Allāh ﷻ had befriended. This also shows what an exalted position is held by those righteous individuals whom even great Prophets like ʾIbārāhīm عليه السلام wished to join.

As for the fact that the great Prophets ﷺ attained to the position of sincerity, it can be inferred from a number of Qur°ānic verses in different ways.

Allāh ﷻ expressly says in the Qur°ān that only the people of sincerity can eulogize Allāh ﷻ in an appropriate manner:

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سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُصِفُونَ • إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلَصِينَ

subḥana-llāhi °ammā yaşifūn • °llā °ibāda-llāhī-l-mukḥlasīn

Glory be to Allāh above what they describe –
except the chosen servants of Allāh

(Sūrah as Sāāāfat 37:160)

Ordering the Prophet ﷺ to eulogize Him, Allāh ﷻ says:

قُلِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ وَسَلَامٌ عَلَى عِبَادِهِ الَّذِينَ اصْطَفَى ؕ
اللَّهُ خَيْرٌ أَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ

quli-l-ḥamdu li-llāhi wa salāmun °alā °ibādihi-l-ladhīna °iṣṭafa-
allāhu ḵayrun ammā yushrikūn

Say: Praise be to Allāh

and peace be on His servants whom He has chosen.

Is Allāh best or that which you associate [with Him]?

(Sūrah an-Naml 27:59)

The Qur°ān cites °Ibārāhīm ؑ praising Allāh ﷻ saying;

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي وَهَبَ لِي عَلَى الْكِبَرِ إِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ ؕ
إِنَّ رَبِّي لَسَمِيعُ الدُّعَاءِ

°alḥamdu-li-llāhi-l-ladhī wahaba lī °ala-l-kibari °ismā°īla wa-°ishāq;
°inna rabbi-lasamī°u-d-du°ā°

Praise be to Allāh

who has given me in my old age °Ismā°īl and °Ishāq.

My Lord is indeed the hearer of prayer.

(Sūrah °Ibārāhīm 14:39)

Nuḥ ؑ was ordered to glorify Allāh ﷻ with the following words:

فَإِذَا اسْتَوَيْتَ أَنْتَ وَمَنْ مَعَكَ عَلَى الْفُلِّ فَقُلِ
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي نَجَّانَا مِنَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ

fa-°idḥa-s-tawayta °ańta wa mam-ma°aka °ala-l-fulki faquli-l-
ḥamdu li-llāhi-l-latdhī najjánā mina-l-qawmi-ḍḥ-ḍḥālīmīn

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When you and those with you are settled in the Ship, then say:

“Praise be to Allāh

who has rescued us from the people of the wrongdoers!”

(Sūrah al-Mu'minūn, 23:28)

Concerning certain exalted Prophets ﷺ Allāh ﷻ expressly says that they held the position of sincerity. Speaking of Yūsuf ﷺ He ﷻ says:

إِنَّهُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا الْمُخْلَصِينَ

°innahu min °ibadina-l-mukhḷaṣīn

surely he was one of Our sincere servants.

(Sūrah Yūsuf 12:24)

About Mūsā ﷺ He ﷻ says:

وَإِذْ كُنَّا فِي الْكِتَابِ مُوسَى ء إِنَّهُ كَانَ مُخْلَصًا وَكَانَ رَسُولًا نَبِيًّا

wa-dhkur fi-l-kitābi mūsā °innahu kāna mukhḷaṣan

wa kāna rasūlan-nabiyyā

And remember in the Book, Mūsā, he was from the sincere ones
and he was a Messenger [and] a Prophet.

(Sūrah Maryam 19:51)

About °Ibārāhīm, Ishaq and Ya'qub ﷺ the Allāh ﷻ says:

وَإِذْ كُنَّا عِبَادَنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ أُولَى الْأَيْدِي وَالْأَبْصَارِ
إِنَّا أَخْلَصْنَاهُمْ بِخَالِصَةٍ ذِكْرَى الدَّارِ

wa-dhkur °ibādanāā °ibrāhīma wa °ishāqa wa ya°qūba

°ūli-l-°āydi wa-l-°abṣār

°inna °akhḷaṣnāhum bi-khālīṣatin dhikra-d-dār

and remember Our Servants °Ibārāhīm, °Ishāq and Yā°qub
men of true strength and inner sight.

Truly We purified their sincerity

through sincere remembrance of the Final Abode.

(Sūrah Ṣawd 38:45-46)



According to the following verse, Shayṭān can do no harm to the
men sincerely devoted to Allāh ﷻ, Who said:

قَالَ فَبِعِزَّتِكَ لَا أُغْوِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ • إِلَّا عِبَادَكَ مِنْهُمْ الْمُخْلِصِينَ

qāla fa-bi'izzatika la'ughwiyannahum °ajma'īna
°illā °ibādaka minhumu-l-mukhlṣīn

[and °Iblīs] said, 'By Your Might I will seduce every one of them except for Your sincere worshippers from them.'

(Sūrah Ṣawd 38:45-46)

Only those who are insincere before Allāh ﷻ are seduced by °Ibīs:

ثُمَّ لَا تَأْتِيَنَّهُمْ مِنْ بَيْنِ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ
وَعَنْ أَيْمَانِهِمْ وَعَنْ شَمَائِلِهِمْ ۖ وَلَا تَجِدُ أَكْثَرَهُمْ شَاكِرِينَ

thumma lā'atiyannahum mim-bayni °aydīhim wa min khalfīhim
wa'an °aymānīhim wa °an ṣhamā'ilīhim
wa lā tajidu °aktḥarahum ṣhakīrīn

'Then I will come at them, from in front of them and behind them,
from their right and from their left.

You will not find most of them [to be] thankful.'

(Sūrah al-A°raf 7:17)

Several Prophets ﷺ Allāh ﷻ says were chosen:

وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُ إِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ ؑ كُلًّا هَدَيْنَا ۖ وَنُوحًا هَدَيْنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ ۖ
وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِهِ دَاوُدَ وَسُلَيْمَانَ وَأَيُّوبَ وَيُوسُفَ وَمُوسَى وَهَارُونَ ؑ

وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ •

وَزَكَرِيَّا وَيَحْيَى وَعِيسَى وَإِلْيَاسَ ؑ

كُلٌّ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ • وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيُوسُفَ وَلُوطًا ؑ

وَكُلًّا فَضَّلْنَا عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ •

وَمِنْ آبَائِهِمْ وَذُرِّيَّاتِهِمْ وَإِخْوَانِهِمْ

وَاجْتَبَيْنَاهُمْ وَهَدَيْنَاهُمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ •

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wa wahabnā lahu °ishhāq wa ya°qūba; kullān hadayna;
wa nūḥan hadaynā min qablu; wa min dhurriyyatihi
dāwūda wa sulaymāna wa °ayyūba wa yūsufa wa mūsā wa hārūn;
wa kadḥalika najāzi-l-muḥsinīn.
wa zakariyyā wa yaḥyā wa °isā wa °ilyās;
kullun minā-ṣ-ṣālihīn.
wa °ismā°ila wa °ilyasa°a wa yūnusa wa lūṭa
wa kullān faḍḍalnā °ala-l-°alamīn.
wa-min abāa°ihim wa dhurriyyātihim wa °ikḥwānihim;
wa °ijtabaynāhum wa hadaynāhum °ila ṣirāṭim-mustaḳīm.

We gave him °Ishāq and Ya°qūb, each of whom We guided.
And before him We had guided Nūḥ. And among his descendants
were Dāwūd and Sulaymān, and °Ayyūb, Yūsuf, Mūsā and Hārūn.

That is how We reward the doers of good.

And We guided Zakariyah, Yaḥyā, °Isā and °Ilyās.

Each one of them was sincere.

And We guided °Ismā°il, °Ilyasa°a, Yūnus and Luṭ.

Every one of them We favored above all other people.

And We guided some of their forefathers, children and brothers.

We chose them and guided them to a straight path.

(Sūrah al-An°am 6:84-87)

From these verses it may be inferred that all the Prophets held the position of sincerity, whereas in the verses cited earlier only a few Prophets were mentioned. In these verses Allāh ﷻ has said that He ﷻ chose them and favored them “above all other people”.

Those who are insincere before Allāh ﷻ are those who are beguiled and seduced by °Iblīs (إبليس). Therefore we can say that those who are truly sincere cannot be entrapped by °Iblīs, for they are sincerely devoted to Allāh ﷻ. Whenever anyone is described in the Qur°ān as sincere and thankful, we can conclude that such a person is one of the single-minded and sincere worshippers and slaves of Allāh ﷻ.

ذُرِّيَّةَ مَنْ حَمَلْنَا مَعَ نُوحٍ ؕ إِنَّهُ كَانَ عَبْدًا شَكُورًا

dhurriyyata man ḥamalnā ma°a nūḥin °innahu kāna °abdan ṣḥakūrā

[The] seed of those We carried with Nūḥ [in the ark].

Verily, he was a thankful servant!

(Sūrah Bani °Isrā°il, 17:3)

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About Lūṭ ؑ Allāh ﷻ says:

• إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ حَاصِبًا إِلَّا آلَ لُوطٍ ؕ جَعَيْنَاهُمْ لَسِرَةً
نِعْمَةً مِّنْ عِنْدِنَا ؕ كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي مَنْ شَكَرَ

°innaā °arsalnā °alayhim ḥaṣībā °illā-°āla lūṭ ; najjaynāhum bisahar
• ni°matam-min °indina ; kadḥalika najjāzī man shakar

surely We sent a storm of stones upon them save the family of Lūṭ,
whom We rescued in the last watch of the night,
as a blessing from Us: thus do We reward all who are thankful.

(Srah al-Qamar 54:34-35)

About °Ibārāhīm ؑ Allāh ﷻ says:

• إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ كَانَ أُمَّةً قَانِتًا لِلَّهِ
حَنِيفًا وَلَمْ يَكُ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ
شَاكِرًا لِأَنْعَمِهِ ؕ اجْتَبَاهُ وَهَدَاهُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

°inna °ibārāhīma kāna °ummatan qānitan li-llāhi
ḥanīfañ-wa lam yaku mina-l-mushrikīn •

shākiran li-an°umih; °ijtabāhu wa hadāhu °ilā ṣirāṭim-mustaqīm.

Surely °Ibārāhīm was a community in himself,
exemplary, obedient to Allāh, a man of pure natural belief.
He was not one of the idolaters. He was thankful for His blessings.
Allāh chose him and guided him to a straight path.

(Sūrah an-Naḥl 16:120)

All the other Prophets ﷺ who have been described as thankful are in principle men of sincerity. Allāh ﷻ chose them from amongst all men as if they were taken up carefully and put somewhere safely. On this basis the case of those who have been chosen is different from all other men. They are the people who are exclusively devoted to Allāh ﷻ and are especially favored by Him and this applies to the people of sincerity because they have attached themselves exclusively to Him ﷻ and have severed their relations from everything else. Choosing in this verse is not related only to those mentioned in it by name, for Allāh ﷻ says:

وَمِنْ آبَائِهِمْ وَذُرِّيَّاتِهِمْ وَإِخْوَانِهِمْ
• وَاجْتَبَيْنَاهُمْ وَهَدَيْنَاهُمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

wa-min aba³ihim wa dhurriyyatihim wa ³ikhwānihim;
wa ³ijtabaynāhum wa hadaynāhum ³ila širaṭim-mustaqīm.

And We guided some of their forefathers, children and brothers.
We chose them and guided them to a straight path.

(Sūrah al-An³am 6:87)

Here the word *brothers* means moral and spiritual brothers, of these Prophets ﷺ, that is, those who share spiritual knowledge with them. Therefore the statement appears to be applying to all Prophets ﷺ, and it may be argued that all Prophets ﷺ are people of sincerity, because they have attached themselves exclusively to Him ﷻ and have severed their relations from everything else and, as we have said, whenever anyone is described in the Qur^ʿān as sincere and thankful, we can easily conclude that such a person is one of the single-minded and sincere worshippers and slaves of Allāh ﷻ.

In conclusion let me cite concerns regarding the spiritual journey:

(1) Renunciation of cultural customs, usages and social formalities, (2) Determination, (3) Moderation, (4) Steadiness, (5) Continuity, (6) Meditation, (7) Accounting the Self, (8) Censuring, (9) Hastening, (10) Faith and Reliance, (11) Observance of the Rules of Veneration, (12) Intention, (13) Silence, (14) Abstaining from Food or at least Observing Frugality, (15) Abstaining from Tasty Food, (16) Solitude, (17) Nighttime Vigil, (18) Continuous Ritual Cleanliness, (19) Practicing modesty and humility to the utmost degree, (20) Secrecy, (21) Taking the Preceptor and Spiritual Guide, (22) Daily Verbal Recitation of Liturgies (³ahzāb), (23) Remembrance, (24) Recollection (*muraqabah*), (25) Excising Evil thoughts, (26) Eradication of Shayṭānic Insinuations (وَسْوَسٍ).

There are two things which are especially helpful in receiving the light of gnostic knowledge: (1) Covering all the stages of meditation; and (2) Concentrating attention on self. If the devotee paid full attention to secure these two things, he would gradually perceive that despite its variety the whole universe was being nurtured from one source, that is the source of all that happens in the world.

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Whatever perfection, excellence or beauty anything in the world possesses, it is a gift from that source. Everything has received a share of existence, beauty and grandeur according to its capacity. The generosity of the Absolute Munificent is for all, but everything existing gets its share according to its capacity and nature.

Anyway, if the spiritual traveler adheres to complete meditation and attention to self, four worlds will gradually be revealed to him:

First World - Unity of Actions: In the beginning the spiritual traveler will feel that he himself is the source of all that his tongue says, his ears hear and his hands, feet and other limbs do. He will think that he does whatever he likes. Later he will feel that he himself is the source of all that happens in the world. At the next stage he will feel that his existence is closely connected with Allāh ﷻ and through this relationship the favors and bounties of Allāh ﷻ, reach the creation. Ultimately he will perceive that Allāh ﷻ alone is the source of all actions and occurrences.

Second World – Unity of Attributes: This world emerges after the first world. At this stage when the spiritual traveler hears or sees anything, he feels that Allāh ﷻ is the source of his hearing and seeing. Later he perceives that Allāh ﷻ is the source of all knowledge, power, life, hearing and sight found anywhere and in any form.

Third World – Unity of Names: This world emerges after the second world. At this stage the devotee feels that the Divine attributes are not in any way separate from the Divine essence. When he sees that Allāh ﷻ is the Knower, he feels that his being knower is also Allāh ﷻ being The Knower. Similarly he thinks that his having power, his sight and his hearing are Allāh ﷻ having The Power, His sight and His hearing, for he is sure that on principle there is only One Being in the whole universe who is having power and who sees and hears. It is His Power and His Sight and His Hearing that are reflected and indicated by everything existing according to its capacity.

Fourth World – Unity of Being: This world is higher than the third world. It is revealed to the spiritual traveler in consequence to the revelation of the glory of Divine Essence. He at this stage perceives that there is only One Being who is the source of all actions and attributes.

At this stage his attention remains concentrated on the One Being and is not drawn to His names and attributes. He attains to this stage only when he has annihilated his transient existence completely and has passed away in Allāh ﷻ. It would be difficult and far from truth even to call this stage the station of Divine Essence or Divine Unity, for the Reality is far above any name that is uttered or written. No name can be given to the Divine Essence and no station of it can be imagined. Allāh ﷻ is even above the question of not being imagined for even negative expressions would mean that He has some limits, whereas He is above all limitations. When the spiritual traveler attains to this stage, he will have annihilated his self and ego completely. He will recognize neither himself nor anyone else, He will recognize Allāh ﷻ alone.

While passing through each of these worlds the spiritual traveler annihilates a part of his self and ultimately annihilates himself completely.

In the first world he attains to the stage of passing away, for he realizes that he is not the source of any of his doings and that everything is from Allāh ﷻ. Thus he annihilates the traces of his actions.

In the second world, he as the result of attributive manifestation, perceives that knowledge, power and all such qualities exclusively belong to Allāh ﷻ. Thus he effaces the signs of his own attributes.

In the third world the spiritual traveler receives the manifestation of Divine names and perceives that Allāh ﷻ alone is the Knower, the Doer etc. Thus he effaces the signs of his names and designations in His Names and His Designations.

In the fourth world he views the manifestation of the glory of the Divine Essence. As a result he entirely loses his personal entity and feels that, in Truth, there exists nothing but Allāh ﷻ.

May Allāh ﷻ grant us all success.



wa-llāhu ʿalim

Notes:



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